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SUBJECT: CHINA CONTINUES TO PUSH FOR TALKS IN ZIMBABWE

REF: BEIJING 0118

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Ben Moeling. Reasons
1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: China supports the African Union (AU) position that continued negotiations offer the best way to resolve the political crisis in Zimbabwe, according to a Chinese diplomat. China also supports mediation efforts by South Africa and the South African Development Community (SADC) and remains hopeful that Zimbabwean President Mugabe and the opposition party will agree to compromise on a power-sharing agreement. China has urged both the Mugabe government and opposition party to be "mutually yielding and tolerating" in talks. China decided to channel assistance to Zimbabwe through UN agencies in order to expedite delivery of assistance. End Summary.

China Backs AU Position

12. (C) MFA African Affairs Department Southern Africa Division Deputy Director Jiang Zhouteng told PolOff January 21 that pressuring Mugabe to step down is not the best way to resolve the conflict. He said China supports the position of the AU and the "vast majority of African countries" that believe the political dispute in Zimbabwe should be resolved through dialogue and negotiations. Noting that Mugabe's party and the opposition have both agreed to continue talks, Jiang said giving up on talks at this point was "inappropriate." He said China supported South Africa and SADC's ongoing mediation efforts and was hopeful that a "mutually acceptable" power-sharing agreement could be reached. He noted China had urged both Mugabe's party and the opposition to continue negotiations and make an effort to be "mutually yielding and tolerating."

China Using UN Agencies to Deliver Assistance

13. (C) China has provided the UN Development Program and World Health Organization USD 500,000 to fight cholera in Zimbabwe and is planning to distribute food assistance through the UN World Food Program (UNWFP), according to Jiang. He said China decided to channel its assistance through UN agencies because their networks offered the fastest and most effective way to help those in need. He said the Zimbabwe government is currently "paralyzed" and unable to deliver the assistance effectively. Although Jiang acknowledged the problem of corruption in the Zimbabwe government, he stressed that expediency of aid delivery was the main factor behind China's decision to use UN agencies and that Mugabe's government showed "understanding" of this decision. (Note: Reftel reported that China's Ambassador to Zimbabwe told a group of Chinese scholars that Zimbabwe government corruption was a significant factor in China's decision to use the UNWFP to deliver food assistance.)

